

## CHEW PLUG



Chewing a plug of tobacco was easy for Papaw. However, he took great care in preparing the plug and in spitting properly.



First, he made sure small boys were present on the front gallery. He located his cane-bottom chair near a porch post. Papaw tapped his feet to his own secret tune with a heel-to-toe movement as he leaned back until his chair bumped the post.

We knew he was ready to cut the plug when his chair fell forward. All eyes followed his hand removing the small pocketknife from his overalls.

"Fetch me that whetrock on the window sill, boy." The wrinkled weathered face squinted a little as he concentrated on some past experience.

Next, he removed the new plug of Star Tobacco from his bib and placed the whetrock on his knee. Like the motion of an orchestra leader's baton, he made quick strokes with the thin blade across the whetrock. He peeled the cellophane wrapper from one end of the plug and slid the blade tip under the small metal star embedded in the center of the tobacco plug.



Papaw had a bunch of hands reaching for the prized "star". He checked the plug for size before awarding the 'star' to the one attentive boy.

A crooked forefinger guided the blade one-quarter inch into the plug's edge while a thick twisted thumb pushed from the backside of the plug. Then the cut was completed with a second sever parallel to the end. The fresh moist cut remained on the knife blade.

He brought the knife and plug-cut near his face but without stopping lowered them near his lap; and either cleared his throat with a grunt or laughed a little. This is where his tall tale began. Between parts of his story, he inserted the plug with the flat surface of the blade pressing his lips and tipping just below his nostrils.

The old master made sure we all had a clear look at his protruding cheek. He looked up the dirt road and then back towards the barn. Papaw did not chew. He chomped. A few remaining teeth were visible during the first few chomps.

To catch an overflow, his head tilted in the opposite direction and his mouth closed. A wipe or two and the chomps turned to chews. The plug shifted to the other cheek between high points of the tall tale.

Old wrinkled spotted hands waved a 'wait-a-minute' signal. The story had to wait a bit. He closed the knife and returned it to a regular safe pocket as he had done for over fifty years. A big sharp Adam's apple bobbed and a quick frown reflected tasting this wonderful juice. The nearest grandson passed the empty tomato can to Papaw. His story was completed with a nod and wink.

Knowing the anticipated first spit was near, all eyes were glued to the distance of the can from his mouth. Without warning, he lifted the can just beneath his chin and the tobacco shifted as his head dropped quickly. His lips tightened as if a persimmon had just been tasted.

SPIT! The action flashed. Papaw lowered the can to his knee, relaxed and savored the time with five toe-headed smiling grandsons.